

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1073

INFO AMEMBASSY DAESSALLAM

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MRN TO READ 2891 VICE 3891)

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BC

SUBJECT: IAN KHAMA APPOINTED CHIEF OF BAMANGWATO

1. OFFICE OF PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED NOVEMBER 14 THAT IAN KHAMA (24), ELDEST SON OF PRESIDENT KHAMA, HAS BEEN APPOINTED TRADITIONAL CHIEF OF THE BAMANGWATO TRIBE. WHEN HE ASSUMES HIS NEW DUTIES, YOUNG KHAMA WILL BECOME CHIEF OF BOTSWANA'S LARGEST TRIBE, THE COUNTRY'S PARAMOUNT TRADITIONAL LEADER, AND A POTENTIALLY POWERFUL NATIONAL POLITICAL FIGURE. UPON HIS INSTALLATION AS CHIEF, KHAMA MUST RELINQUISH HIS CURRENT POST AS BRIGADIER AND DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE (BDF).

2. DAILY NEWS ARTICLE ON APPOINTMENT DESCRIBED IT AS "BREAKTHROUGH" FOR BAMANGWATO TRIBE IN RESOLVING LONG UNSETTLED SUCCESSION TO ITS CHIEFTANSHIP. TRIBAL AUTHORITY AMONG THE BAMANGWATO HAS BEEN EXERCISED BY

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SUCCESSION OF EIGHT PEOPLE SINCE DEATH OF CHIEF TSHEKEDI IN 1959. WHILE PRESIDENT KHAMA HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED AS DE FACTO LEADER OF BAMANGWATO, HE NEVER OFFICIALLY ASSUMED TITLE AS CHIEF BECAUSE OF CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING HIS MARRIAGE TO AN ENGLISHWOMAN. IN RECENT YEARS, BAMANGWATO HAVE BECOME MORE INSISTENT THAT POST OF CHIEF BE FILLED AND HAVE REJECTED ALL PROPOSALS THAT SOMEONE

OTHER THAN MEMBER OF ROYAL FAMILY BE APPOINTED. IT IS RUMORED THAT PRESIDENT AT ONE POINT SUGGESTED THAT ONE OF HIS YOUNGER TWIN SONS BE APPOINTED CHIEF, BUT THIS WAS REPORTEDLY REJECTED BY BAMANGWATO TRIBAL MEETING (KGOTLA) BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE NECESSITATED APPOINTMENT OF REGENT.

3. PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO AGREE TO HIS SON'S APPOINTMENT MAY WELL HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY PASSAGE OF BILL IN LAST SESSION OF PARLIAMENT WHICH PROVIDES THAT ACTUAL ASSUMPTION OF DUTIES BY NEWLY APPOINTED CHIEF MAY BE INDEFINITELY POSTPONED BY THE PRESIDENT. DAILY NEWS ARTICLE STATED THAT "AFTER A LONG ARGUMENT" AGREEMENT WAS REACHED BETWEEN THE BAMANGWATO AND THE GOVERNMENT THAT IAN KHAMA WOULD NOT TAKE UP HIS NEW DUTIES UNTIL AT LEAST MID-1978. ACCORDINT TO UK HICOM OFFICER HOGARTH, BOTH IAN KHAMA AND SECRETARY TO CABINET STEENKAMP HAVE GECE TLY STATED THAT KHAMA WILL REMAIN WITH THE BDF IN "FORSEEABLE FUTURE". WHEN QUERIED BY EMBOFF ON THIS POINT, PRESIDENTIAL AIDE LEGWAILA STATED THAT NO DATE FOR KHAMA'S ASSUMPTION OF CHIEFTANSHIP HAD BEEN SET AND THAT HE WOULD CONTINUE TO "SERVE HIS COUNTRY IN THE ARMED FORCES". MOREOVER, DAILY NEWS (NOVEMBER 16) ANNOUNCED THAT PRESIDENT HAS APPOINTED MOKGACHA MOKGADI TO SERVE AS TRIBAL AUTHORITY (I.E., SURROGATE FOR CHIEF) CONFIRMING THAT IAN KHAMA IS IN NO HURRY TO ASSUME HIS NEW POST. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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4. COMMENT: PROSPECT OF INDEFINITE DELAY IN IAN'S DEPARTURE FROM BDF WAS PROBABLY DECISIVE FACTOR IN KHAMA FAMILY'S DECISION TO AGREE TO HIS APPOINTMENT AS BAMANGWATO CHIEF. KHAMA IS HIS NATION'S ONLY NON-EUROPEAN PILOT AND A SANDHURST GRADUATE WHO IS AS ATTRACTED TO MILITARY LIFE AS HE IS NEEDED IN HIS POSITION AS BDF DEPUTY COMMANDER. HE WOULD PROBABLY VERY RELUCTANTLY LEAVE THE DRILL FIELD FOR THE DAY-TO-DAY ADMINISTRATIVE AND QUASI-LEGAL HEADACHES OF CHIEFTANSHIP.

5. PRESIDENT KHAMA MAY ALSO HAVE DECIDED THAT IF HIS SON HAD REFUSED TO ACCEPT APPOINTMENT, THE DOMINANT BAMANGWATO TRIBE MIGHT ULTIMATELY HAVE BEEN ALIENATED FROM THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT. NO GOVERNMENT OF BOTSWANA CAN FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY WITHOUT BAMANGWATO SUPPORT. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER BAMANGWATO WILL BE SATISFIEDL WITH APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF WHO APPARENTLY INTENDS TO LEAVE DAILY ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRIBE TO OTHERS.

6. IT IS, OF COURSE, TOO EARLY TO PREDICT INFLUENCE OF

THE APPOINTMENT ON IAN KHAMA'S FUTURE POLITICAL AMBITIONS
AND CAREER. IF IAN KHAMA IS ABLE TO USE CHIEFTANSHIP TO
CONSOLIDATE POLITICAL BASE AMONG BAMANGWATO, HE CAN
PROBABLY COUNT ON A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN NATIONAL POLITICS
(IF HE WANTS IT). IN THIS CONNECTION, CHIEFTANSHIP WOULD
BECOME POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP FOR IAN KHAMA DEALING
WITH GRASSROOTS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS WHICH FACE
BOTSWANA.

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